School Based Mental Health Interventions in a High Trauma Setting
Part 1: Background

Special Focus on Newcomer Students

Presentation Overview

• Trauma 101
• Immigrants and Refugees: Forced Migrants
  • Immigration 101
  • Changes in policy
  • Reminders
• Trauma Sensitive Work

Trauma

What does trauma mean to you?

What does trauma do?

What does trauma look like?
**Trauma**

- Two components:
  - (Traumatic) **event**
  - the (Trauma) **response** to the event (aka its impact)

- An event is traumatic if it is extremely upsetting, at least temporarily overwhelms the individual’s internal resources, and produces lasting psychological symptoms. (Briere & Scott, 2013)

  *This is not the same as the DSM V definition for PTSD criteria*

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**Trauma 101: Traumatic events**

Different things are traumatic to different people. However, there are some things that we can agree in general can be traumatic:

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Rape
- Neglect
- Torture, imprisonment
- Poverty, hunger
- War/Combat trauma
- Early loss of a parent or caregiver
- Community/violence
- Serious accidents
- Loss of a child or sibling
- Chronic illness, repeated hospitalizations, terminal illness, significant procedures
- Natural disasters
- Terrorism
- Forced displacement, multiple moves
- Kidnapping, torture, death threats
- Witness to violence, abuse, death
- Bullying
- Separation from parent or caregiver

(Berger Cardoso, J 2016), (NCTSN, 2019)

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**Trauma 101: What makes an event traumatic**

- Controllability (lack of)
  
  Loss of control is more stressful than lack of control

- Predictability (lack of)
  
  Inability to predict danger leads to generalization of fear

- Subjective experience
  
  The meaning the event has to the individual

- Proximity to the event, gruesomeness, “close”

- Personal “nature” of the event; varying degrees of interpersonal involvement
**Trauma 101: What makes an event traumatic**

The personal nature of traumatic event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impersonal</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Attachment Trauma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic (not referring to vulnerable and exploited populations or those living in poverty who lack resources)</td>
<td>Gendersonate Trauma inflicted interaction with a stranger</td>
<td>Grows in an attachment relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- "Double liability" generates internal distress: undermines the development of mental and interpersonal capacities needed to regulate that distress

- Ex: floods, tornado, fire, volcano, terrorism
- Ex: Criminal assault, rape, kidnapping, war
- Ex: Physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment

**Trauma 101: Types of Trauma**

- Single event trauma/Acute
- Chronic trauma
- Complex trauma or Complicated trauma
- Sanctuary trauma
- Vicarious (Secondary) Trauma
  - Historical trauma
  - Collective trauma

**Trauma 101: Responses to trauma**

Individuals have different and varied responses to trauma that can hide behind other problems. Common responses & problems include:

- Appetite changes
- Bulimia, anorexia
- Sleep changes
- Nightmare
- Flashbacks
- Fear
- Anxiety, Panic
- Anger
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Numbness, disconnected
- Loss of trust
- Loss/change in self-image
- Racing or pounding heart
- Irritability
- Agitated
- Hypersomnia
- Headaches
- Self-harm
- Aches and pains
- Developmental impact in children
- Long-term health problems
- ACT’s
- Increase in high risk behavior, self-medicating
- Abandonment
- Bed wetting/floss of bowels
- Alcohol and drug use and abuse
- Neurological changes
- Shame
- Isolation
- Hopelessness
- Mood swings
- Increased need to control situations
- Distracted, difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering
Trauma 101: Trauma in the Brain

Exposure to traumatic experience can lead to structural changes in the way the brain develops.

- Reduced brain activity and decreased brain activation in areas related to language, memory, conscious fear awareness, and emotion.
- Decreased capacity in brain areas associated with focusing attention and categorizing information.
- Increased brain activation in other areas associated with automatic detection of threats.

**Amygdala Hijacking.** During a traumatic event stimuli goes directly to the thalamus – then amygdala (survival mode) and bypasses neocortex (thinking brain). However, it gets “stuck” and can keep firing, chronic high levels of cortisol damages, destroys and shrinks the hippocampus, which leads to increased cortisol levels. Sustained activation of the stress response system can lead to impairments in learning, memory, and the ability to regulate certain stress responses.

Trauma 101: ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study of 17,000 participants proved that ACEs or various traumatic experiences negatively effect an individuals physical and emotional health throughout the life span.

Impact of Trauma on Education

**Reduced Cognitive Capacity.**

- Incapable of perspective taking.
- Appears unsympathetic, cannot understand how others actions affect others, student just doesn’t “get it.”
- Misinterprets stimuli and sees anger or threatening behavior when there is none.

- Reduced Cognitive Capacity:
  -streamlining, attention and recall.
  -Does not remember instructions, retain concept, does not complete assignments, forgets homework, misses supplies, et al. (Howell, 2020)
Trauma 101: Mental Health outcomes

PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder)
Depression
Anxiety

Acute Stress disorder
Reactive attachment disorder
Dissociative identity Disorder
ADD/ADHD
Borderline Personality Disorder

Adjustment disorder

Refugees and Immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee</th>
<th>SIV</th>
<th>Parole</th>
<th>Asylum Seeker</th>
<th>Immigrant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>Central America Minors (CAM)</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Syria</td>
<td>Burma (Myanmar)</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
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<td>Nigeria</td>
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<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>Sudan</td>
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<td>(currently)</td>
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</tbody>
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This is NOT meant to be a complete or comprehensive list of nationalities.
Nationalities can fall under multiple categories, they are not limited to one type of immigration status; these are most frequently observed as newcomers.
Refugees, especially children often identify with the country they have lived in most recently, not the “refugee producing country.”

Forced Migrants
Resettled Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Refugees are individuals that have been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence.

Asylum-seekers are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined, irrespective of when they may have been lodged.

Resettled Refugees are those that have been resettled or “transferred” from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement.
Central American Minors

Contrary to the way it is characterized in the media it is NOT illegal to seek asylum.

There is often no legal way to immigrate, there is no “line to wait in.”

Asylum claims that are denied does not necessarily indicate that they are false claims, simply they do not meet the threshold or definition at the asylum officer or immigration judges discretion. Or fit the ever changing criteria the current administration is implementing.

Resettled Refugee Newcomers VS Asylum Seeker Newcomers

Forced Migrant Trauma
School Community: Stress and Needs

- High poverty, lack of resources
- Often neighborhoods with high rates of violence and insecurity
- Experienced a pattern of broken, failed relationships that were unable to protect them from harm
- Unfamiliar family dynamics
- Uncertain legal future - their future is outside of their control
  - Currently involved in immigration legal system
  - Many may be facing deportation
- Safety is #1 priority
- Holding space and conveying patience

2017-2019 policy changes and stressors

- Executive Orders, Travel Bans
- Attempts to discourage immigration north, Wall
- Decrease in refugee numbers
- SB4, ID yourself
- End of DACA
- End of TPS
- DACA trade/"tougher asylum"
- Child Refugee Program Terminated, sail redefined, targeting sponsors
- "Zero tolerance" and family separations at border
- Attacking protections provided by Flores Settlement Agreement
- Public Charge
- Safe third country agreement with Guatemala
- Migrant Protection Protocol (remain in Mexico), Metering
- Media and Political Conversations that vilify foreigners
- Panicked immigrant community living in a trans crisis state
- Natural disasters locally and around the world
- Increase in conflict in Central and South America
- Venezuela Crisis (hyperinflation, political turmoil)
- Nicaragua (protests, riots, violent govt crackdown)
- Guatemala (expulsion of CICIG, "slow-motion coup")

School Community: Stress and Needs

Traditional: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- Safety
- Love/Belonging
- Ego
- Self-actualization

Reality

- Physiological
- Safety
- Love/Belonging
- Ego
- Safety

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Howell (2020)
Strategies: Foundational skills

- Trauma Informed
  - SEL (social emotional learning)
  - Integrating non-traditional interventions

*Mental Health integrated into campus/services/interactions, high priority placed on mental health needs
  - Individual, groups, resources, focus on problem solving and reducing barriers

Trauma Sensitive Perspective

Strategies: School Foundation

Trauma Informed School

School
Academics, teaching methods, structure, expectations and social relationships

Trauma Lens
A Trauma Sensitive School
10 Compassionate Teaching Principles

Questions